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U of P Professor Denies Reporting To CIA After Student Visit to Russia

A University of Pennsylvania history professor today branded as "aburd" an accusation in Pravda Wednesday that he and a fellow exchange student were pumped for information by CIA agents after a Russian visit in 1958-59.

Dr. Alfred J. Riebner, 35, who now lives in Berwyn, said he has never had any dealings with the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency, as charged by the Communist Party newspaper in Moscow.

Riebner's name, misspelled in the translation of the Pravda article as Ribner, was among those named in an article charging that the CIA has used American exchange students in the Soviet Union for espionage work.

Five of those named in the article were among the 18 American students who spent the school year of 1958-59 studying at Moscow University as the first group under a student exchange program that is still operating.

Studying for Doctorate

Dr. Riebner was one of them. His stay in the Soviet Union was sponsored by Columbia University, where he was then studying for his doctorate in history. The Pravda article said that U. S. students returning from the Soviet Union via France were invited to lunch by CIA agents in Paris and asked in detail "about everything they saw and heard."

It named two of the students as Riebner and David MacKenzie.

Agent Under Table?

Riebner said MacKenzie was a fellow history major from Columbia University and is now a professor of history at Wells College in Aurora, N. Y.

"We went to lunch with a lot of people in Paris," Riebner said. "Maybe there was a CIA agent under the table that we didn't know about. More seriously, he said he believes the Russian writers 'just reached into the file and pulled

Course for Students

Also in the group with Riebner and MacKenzie was Albert Todd, now a history professor at Queens College, New York.

The Pravda article said Todd ran a six-week preparatory course for exchange students going to the Soviet Union. It also said Todd was expelled from Czechoslovakia for espionage in 1949 and was sent to Moscow by the CIA as a "scientist-philosopher under the exchange program."

Riebner pointed out that Todd was the coordinator of the recent U. S. tour by Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko and acted as Yevtushenko's translator.

Another Mentioned

Riebner said he knew that Todd operated a course for exchange students after their 1958-59 visit but that it was strictly a course in the Russian language. He said he did not know about the other charges against Todd.

Also mentioned in the Pravda article was someone identified only as "Kennan," who Riebner said he believes is Edward Keenan, also a member of that first group of exchange students.

Keenan was studying at Harvard at the time, Riebner said,

and is now teaching medieval history there.

The Pravda article said "Kennan" and a Michael Luther also worked for the CIA in Russia.

Riebner said Luther was also in the group. He, too, was studying at Columbia at the time, he said, and is now teaching at Hunter College in New York.

Riebner, a native New Yorker in his first year at Penn, said those in his group would have had little of interest to report to the CIA anyway.

Spent Time in Library

"We spent most of our time in the library," he said.

He added that his group was "assured on a very high level that the CIA was keeping its hands off the exchange program." He would not say who gave the assurances, but said he was satisfied that it was true.

Riebner returned to the Soviet Union last year, spending from January to May in Moscow with his wife, Edith, as an exchange scholar under a program of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

He won his bachelor's degree from Colgate University in 1953, his master's from Columbia in 1954 and his doctorate there in 1959. He taught for eight years at Northwestern University before coming to Penn.